

CATHERINE'S LITERARY WORK

golden age of the Italian vernacular, as far as possible removed from Petrarca's would-be Ciceronian Latin ; her eloquence is spontaneous and unsought; at times, in her letters as in the *Dialogo*, the richness of the writer's ideas is such that the rapidity and ardour of her thought outleaps the bounds of speech, metaphor follows close upon metaphor, one image has hardly been formed when another takes its place, until logic and grammar are swept away in the flood and torrent of impassioned words.

The simple, but profound philosophy underlying all Catherine's writings is the same that, put into practice, armed her to pass unsubdued and unshaken through the great game of the world.

Love is the one supreme and all-important, all-embracing, all-enduring, limitless and boundless thing. In a famous passage of the *Purgatorio*, Dante had shown how Creator and every creature is moved by love; how, in rational beings, love is the seed of every virtue and of every vice, because love's natural tendency to good is the material upon which Free Will works for bliss or bane.¹ But Catherine goes a step further than this. Not only God, but man, in a sense, is love. " Think," she writes, " that the first raiment that we had was love ; for we are created to the image and likeness of God only by love, and, therefore, man cannot be without love, for he is made of nought else than very love ; for all that he has, according to the soul and according to the body, he has by love. The father and mother have given being to their child, that is, of the substance of their flesh (by means of the grace of God), only by love." ² And in another place: " The soul cannot live without love, but must always love something, because she was created through love. Affection moves the understanding, as it were saying : I want to love, for the food wherewith I am fed is love. Then the understanding, feeling itself awakened by affection, rises as though it said : If thou wouldst love, I will give thee what thou canst love."³ Love nurtures the virtues like children at its breast; it robes the

¹ *Purg.* xvii. and xviii.

² Appendix, Letter I. Cf. Letter 196 (4). ³ *Dtakgo*, cap. 51.